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*How the secrets of the clandestine recovery  
of a Soviet submarine were preserved*

## SECURITY: HIDDEN SHIELD FOR PROJECT AZORIAN

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The technological feats accomplished in building and operating the *Hughes Glomar Explorer* and maintaining the Hughes deep-ocean mining cover were the "up front" elements of Project AZORIAN.\* But behind the scenes equally important activities were taking place, quietly and professionally.

One of staunchest, most dedicated groups participating in AZORIAN was CIA's Office of Security. Their policies and their procedures provided the day-to-day shield which protected the program and the myriad of people working on it. It was the individual security officers assigned to the program who implemented the policies and procedures, or often quickly improvised new ones on the spot in unusual situations. They provided the rivets that held the security shield together and in place.

The immediate purpose of the security shield was to prevent the leakage of information to the news media. Its ultimate purpose, of course, was the denial to the Soviets of any shred of knowledge about the true objectives of the program.

The first security officer on the scene set the tone and standards for security from Day One. He was followed by more than 20 others who were assigned for varying lengths of time directly to the AZORIAN project and its related activities. They were supported by the unheralded troops in the Office of Security's field offices and in the trenches at Headquarters who did the routine legwork and deskwork so essential to the maintenance of a successful security program. The dedication and hard work of all the officers made it possible for the program to run as long as it did without the erosion of the cover story and without a breakdown in program security.

### Establishing the Security Base

The CIA-Department of Defense agreement which established AZORIAN as a priority program was signed 19 August 1969. It gave the security management responsibility to the Director of Security, CIA, who would act for the Director of Central Intelligence. The Director of Security had already asked the chief of his Special Security Center to assume day-to-day responsibility for the compartmentation which would be necessary to protect program information. The first security officer had been assigned to the embryonic Special Projects Staff and had been drawing up the over-all security plan as well as the specifics for the AZORIAN program. It was the security plan that was code-named JENNIFER, and because this word would appear on the cover of all AZORIAN-related documents, among those on the fringes of the program it came to be synonymous with the project itself.

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\* The story of the *Hughes Glomar Explorer* is told in *Studies in Intelligence* Volume 22 No. 3, Fall 1978. Other aspects of the AZORIAN program are dealt with in Volume 23 No. 2 and No. 3, Summer and Fall 1979.

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By 15 July 1969 a draft of the security plan was sent to the DOD for comment and on the day the AZORIAN project agreement was signed the first JENNIFER security guide was issued. This policy paper was a 13-page directive covering the background of the program, general security policy, personnel security, personnel restrictions and requirements, physical security, contracting and funding security, communications security and public information control. The second security directive was issued on 12 December 1969 and spelled out procedures for handling program documents in government and industry. Industrial aspects of security were to grow increasingly important as the commercial nature of the AZORIAN cover plan unfolded.

The program manager had a philosophy about security that proved to be invaluable; it was especially applicable to the movement into a new world of commercial cover and security for a major technical effort. This philosophy was that security would be involved in every aspect of the program, including planning, from the very first. Security was not to be used just to clean up a mess or tamp down flaps after they developed. It was to be part of all program deliberations. The imprimatur of security was to be obtained before any action was taken. In this way many potential problems were avoided or finessed without causing a stir. The security officers responded to the philosophy with an attitude of, "How can we help you solve your problem?" In this way a healthy and mutual respect developed between the engineers and their enormous engineering problems and the security officers who were charged with protecting "Mission Impossible" from disclosure.

#### Design and Development

As the program moved out of the formative stage into design and development, there was an increasing demand for security approvals on contractor employees. A concerted effort was made to restrict the numbers of individuals briefed on AZORIAN in order to limit the targeting and penetration opportunities available to industrial and foreign espionage. But the program couldn't be done in a vacuum; contractors had to have access to the program. Because it was an ostensibly commercial effort, all industrial personnel had to be investigated by the Office of Security without showing government interest. To have shown a U.S. Government footprint during a background investigation would have blown the cover. Approximately (b)(3)(c) investigations were done. All personnel approved for access met the strict security criteria for AZORIAN. It was the largest effort of this type ever undertaken by the Office of Security.

Within the security approval for the program, three levels of access were established based on the need-to-know principle. The highest level gave full program knowledge and was limited to those who needed the information to carry out their part of the program and to those going on the mission. The more remote one's activity or involvement, the lower his access approval.

Mechanisms were developed to obtain other special security approvals. Certain commercially employed individuals needed (b)(3)(c) but it had to be granted without widespread knowledge within the (b)(3)(c). It would not make sense to be granting (b)(3)(c) to Global Marine or Hughes Tool Company employees. The Office of Security worked out an arrangement with their counterpart (b)(3)(c) to have these clearances granted and at the same time limit the knowledge of it to a handful of AZORIAN-cleared people (b)(3)(c). It was the use of this kind of procedure that allowed AZORIAN to go ahead on a very rapid time scale.

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During this stage of the program another landmark security decision was made. This was the so called "team spirit approach." Contractor personnel at the top level were to be considered full members of the team. What the government knew, they would know within the area relevant to contractors. And on board ship there were to be no second-class citizens. This policy was kept, and the only information withheld from top-level contractors (they were told in general terms what was being withheld) concerned primarily [redacted] (b)(1) (b)(3)(c)

All information on the target and its value was explained, particularly on the nuclear weapons problem, and all questions were answered on this potentially hazardous situation. Later on, in the spring of 1975, after AZORIAN was blown in the news media but not yet officially canceled, this team spirit philosophy produced its rewards. Contractor personnel were offered money—as much as \$1500—for stories, but none of the ship's crew succumbed. One man who was on the program as an office employee for four months did talk to the press at that time, apparently on his own volition. The team spirit concept also drew out of everyone involved an effort above and beyond the call of duty. Several hazardous tasks were performed and nothing extra was sought. Future programs of this nature could profit immensely from the application of the team spirit approach to security.

Security personnel handled almost all the briefings of people, both government and industrial, coming onto the project. The briefings were not just time-consuming; they were the first aspect of AZORIAN that newcomers encountered, and it was important that they be done right. Likewise, as people left the program, security officers gave them their final briefing. It was the last and, perhaps, most lasting impression people would have of the project. It, too, had to be done just right. Just one disgruntled individual, either as he came on the program or as he left, could blow AZORIAN out of the water. It is a tribute to the security officers that no such incident occurred.

During the design and development phase a more commercial flavor was coming into the program, and it became necessary to use individuals with industrial security experience. The program office [redacted] (b)(3)(c) was staffed with a cadre of security officers [redacted] Others were hired and integrated into Global Marine and Summa (the successor to Hughes Tool.) The senior commercial security officer on the West Coast became the alter ego for the senior Headquarters security officer. Often these security officers were used as generalists and advisors to give commercial guidance on methods that should be used. The U.S. Government footprint was to be avoided while at the same time the government's seal of approval had to be obtained.

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**Hardware Acquisition**

While management was preparing material for the never-ending reviews of the program, security was being burdened by a never-ending demand for security access approvals from contractors. Hardware acquisition was beginning, and that meant even more personnel involvement; operating crews for the *Glomar Explorer* were being recruited, and still more background investigations were required. All were being done by the Office of Security without showing government interest. To add to the load, the Agency technical, planning, and contracting officers were traveling more frequently to visit contractors. The work schedules had to be met; face-to-face meetings were required. It wouldn't do for the contractors to continually troop into Washington, D.C. The Agency people had to visit the contractors at their home plants or at neutral meeting places. Stringent security measures were required to permit these activities to occur without damaging cover. Every detail had to be examined in order to mask the government's presence.

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Security provided support of all types to meetings that took place in cities all over the country. No task was too small or ignoble if it meant protection for AZORIAN. Many of these meetings were attended by very senior government officials as well as by senior corporate officials, some of whom were closely allied with Howard Hughes. The cover would never have held if meetings between officials at this level had

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become public knowledge. Rooms, apartments, and meeting places were obtained.

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Security officers acted as chauffeurs getting the high and mighty as well as the not-so-high and mighty to meetings (b)(3)(c)

They served as caterers, too, providing a food service so that meetings could continue through the lunch and dinner hours when necessary. Security handled the glamorous with aplomb, the mundane with professionalism, and the trivial with a smile.

Along with the steady flow of people around the country, there was a cascade of documents that required movement. In the government world, there were the usual security classification stamps.

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To move all these documents securely among the many contractor and government offices was an onerous task. This was made worse by the spate of aircraft hijackings that was taking place in the early 1970's. Security officers spent many hours (b)(3)(c)

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in order to keep the information moving.

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The ability to move documents almost immediately was one more factor which helped to keep the program on schedule.

**Testing**

As the hardware took shape and became pieces of operating equipment, this equipment had to be tested, and government employees would be heavily involved in all aspects of the testing phase. They would be in charge of at-sea operations and also be members of the various working crews.

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There was also essential equipment to be loaded aboard which could not stand public scrutiny, (b)(1)

For each problem the security officers devised a successful solution (b)(3)(c)

For those going on the *Glomar Explorer* it was that offered protection. In this program every government employee

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(b)(1)

Equipment that needed protection from disclosure also was put on the ship in a secure way

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Government visitors to the ship during the at-sea testing phase moved under the constant and watchful eye of security officers.

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An extra hazard during the testing phase tried security's mettle. This was the labor strife at the pier stemming from the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association's attempt to unionize the crews working for Global Marine. The Global Marine management people were adamantly opposed to the union, and the case went to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which scheduled hearings and pondered whether to conduct a union shop election among Global Marine's employees. The hearing process was long, tedious, and full of delays, and all the while CIA had to walk a tightrope and maintain a neutral posture. Global Marine was notorious for its swift firing of employees who did not meet management's strict standards, and some of the *Glomar Explorer's* crew were union sympathizers; on the other hand, unionization of GMI at this stage, and the imposition of hiring hall procedures, would complicate the background investigation process and crew selection. For a while the government considered taking the union leaders into its confidence and asking their help in preserving AZORIAN's security.

Two incidents particularly stretched the security officers' nerves during the proceedings: Early on, the union forces, including some strong-arm types, appeared at the gate to the pier and things got quite tense; the non-union crew members were not

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shrinking violets either. The union gang slashed a few tires and strewed nails on the roadway, but the security people kept their cool and no fight erupted. Meanwhile, during a recess in the NLRB hearings, some union lawyers were heard to mutter that the DOMP was not what it purported to be. A union member was able to reassure the alarmed security officers that the comments were just so much hot air; there was no problem with the DOMP cover.

Finally, as the AZORIAN project neared completion, the NLRB hearings worked their own way to a conclusion, and Global Marine remained non-unionized. More important to the government, CIA had been able to preserve its involvement from public exposure without affecting the course of the labor negotiations.

## Operations

The D-day for the mission approached rapidly. The Headquarters and program office members of security were working on the security annexes to the mission plans. All contingency situations had security connotations. There were casualty and accident plans to be drawn up.

(b)(1) How was the port call to be handled?

(b)(1) How was the crew change going to be conducted at either Midway or Hawaii? Security strategies and procedures for these situations were formulated and incorporated into the mission plans. Wives of the government employees going on the mission were given limited briefings concerning the absence of their husbands. Security officers were to be their point of contact if any of them had problems they couldn't cope with. There was flurry of last-minute activity which assured that mission readiness was achieved.

The mission director adopted the program manager's philosophy about the role of security in the program. On board the *Glomar Explorer*, the security officer was part and parcel of all management discussions, and no actions were planned without seeking this security officer's advice and counsel. In this way potential security problems were exposed and resolved before they became flaps.

During the mission one of the mundane jobs was the routine destruction of classified paper. most of it generated (b)(1) This problem first surfaced (b)(3)(c) solution then was to hand-tear small amounts of paper into tiny pieces and dump them over the side (b)(1) One night while the paper was being dumped the old axiom "don't spit into the wind" was relearned at the cost of anxious moments spent gathering up tiny pieces of paper from the main deck. A few weeks later while under surveillance (b)(1) unclassified paper trash (mostly old invoices) dumped overboard by the Global Marine supply man was promptly collected by the inquisitive Soviet crew. Thanks to these lessons, the security officer aboard the *Glomar Explorer* had a paper shredder which he used to turn all classified paper into a powder-like material which was dumped overboard at night. He was also in charge of the emergency destruction procedures.

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The security officer worked with the ship's crew to be sure that the well area was secure from visual observation as well as Soviet satellite surveillance. In his work with the crew, the security officer became the crew's morale officer, (b)(1)

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(b)(1) His success in generating crew support and confidence was a very positive factor in keeping the crew together during the periods of Soviet surveillance and later on when the news media were on to the program.

One of the hairier aspects of the on-board security officer's job was his intimate involvement in the precautions against any aggressive actions by the Russians. When the Soviet range ship *Chazma* was diverted from its homeward-bound course to give the *Glomar Explorer* a close-in examination, it was the security officer who directed the stacking of boxes and barrels on the ship's helicopter pad prior to the appearance of *Chazma*.

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The security officer was also charged with investigating any attempts by outsiders to penetrate the ship's security while at sea, a seemingly unlikely circumstance addressed seriously by the mission's contingency planners. Observing that it is customary for ships with doctors aboard to respond to calls for medical help from nearby vessels, it had occurred to the security planners that a suspicious or merely curious captain could fake a medical emergency to get some of his men inside the *Glomar Explorer*. And, indeed, a request for medical aid was received while the *Explorer* was at the recovery site from the British freighter *Bel Hudson*, which signaled that one of its crew had suffered an apparent heart attack. After some soul-searching deliberations, the mission director responded to the call and the *Bel Hudson* altered course to meet the *Glomar Explorer* and lay to. The doctor, a medical technician and the security officer went over to look at the victim who, it turned out, was in shock from a minor injury after a fall. He was brought back for treatment and in an hour or so was returned to the British vessel. The security officer was satisfied that the British captain's request was legitimate and that no penetration effort had been attempted.

While the mission was under way, Headquarters security personnel were caught up in the damage assessment of the robbery at the Romaine Street offices of the Summa Corporation. Eventually they had to call in the FBI, which in turn enlisted the Los Angeles Police Department in an attempt to get back a program-related document that supposedly was obtained in the burglary. The document never came to light, but the Romaine Street robbery and the LAPD's attempts to retrieve the document ultimately resulted in the *Los Angeles Times* story which first broke the cover of the program.

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When the mission ended (b)(1) the security people had the task of returning a crew (b)(1) and exchanging them at the island of Maui for a fresh crew. The exchange was effected without any erosion of the cover story, but

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When the *Glomar Explorer* finally returned to Long Beach

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## MATADOR Preparations

Once the decision was made to make a second attempt to complete the recovery mission, the Office of Security's thoughts turned towards the procedures to be used on the new program, code named MATADOR. A review of the procedures used on AZORIAN

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In February 1975 the *Los Angeles Times* combined in one front-page story four sure-fire attention grabbers: the unsolved Romaine Street robbery, Howard Hughes, the CIA, and the recovery of a sunken Soviet submarine. According to the *Times*, the CIA had attempted to recover a Soviet submarine from the depths of the Atlantic Ocean with a ship that Hughes had built with government money. The *Times* managed to link these rumors with a detailed recapitulation of the eight-month-old robbery of the Hughes office on Romaine Street in Encino, in which the burglars had made off with cash and "sensitive papers." Despite the obvious errors in the account, it focused the attention of other journalists on the *Glomar Explorer*. For a while DCI William Colby, by personally appealing to the senior managers of the nation's news media, managed to hold the line against further revelations, but in March Jack Anderson went on national television with his version, and the press floodgates were opened. MATADOR, however, was not yet wholly engulfed, and preparations continued for a mission start date in early July.

The *Glomar Explorer* was soon a fortress besieged as local, regional and national news people poured into the Long Beach area. Helicopters carrying network television crews hovered over the ship. Reporters frequented the Long Beach bars and tried all the arts and tricks of their trade to find knowledgeable sources and persuade them to talk. Waterfront hangers-on were plied with drinks and prostitutes were enlisted in attempts to buy crew lists. Crew members were pestered, badgered and propositioned. The security team gave repeated crew briefings on the dangers of any kind of conversation with people from the news media; their admonition was: "Don't answer any question, no matter how trivial, about the *Glomar Explorer* or its purpose." And the crew and other workers on the program responded by holding the line, even when the press got after their families at home or came at them directly with offers of substantial sums of money.

Only one internal breach marred the record, and security quickly tracked it down. A story appearing in the *New York Times* early in April 1975, though it contained much that was wrong and was designed to be provocative, revealed

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information that must have been obtained from an insider. Clues in the story pointed in one direction, particularly an incidental reference to the issuing of a pair of boots to a new crew member. The logistics records were searched, the receipt for the boots found, and the leaker uncovered. He was an office worker who had been on the program only four months in 1974, resigning shortly before he would have been dismissed. He had not been on the ship, but he had a younger brother among the "B" crew, the one that had met the ship in Hawaii to relieve the recovery crew and help

(b)(1) Under the influence of his older brother, the crew member had discussed aspects of the mission, but it was the older brother who went to the *New York Times* with his own cockeyed, contentious version. Security could do nothing at the time except redouble its warnings to the crew members and everyone else connected with the program to maintain the "no comment" policy.

In 1978 the older brother struck again. He was the co-author of a book about the project, a book mixed with fact and fancy. Although he had signed a secrecy agreement, he had not submitted his manuscript to CIA for review as his secrecy agreements with the Agency required. So far, he has gotten away with the breach of his signed agreement and his word; to prosecute him, the government would have to reveal further classified information, define the factual material in the book, and thus compound the security breaches left ambiguous by the author's uninformed errors and inventions.

Other incidents occurred as the ship was being readied for the new attempt. The Long Beach Harbor Patrol had official access to the pier, and on one occasion a uniformed Harbor Patrol officer accompanied by a civilian drove to the gangway leading up to the main deck of the ship. The civilian jumped out and began to take pictures—a strictly forbidden activity—and then quickly drove away. Security, through the Global Marine superintendent, phoned the Harbor Patrol and explained what had happened. The Harbor Patrol authorities, chagrined, investigated and found the officer responsible for the intrusion. The film was returned undeveloped with an apology. The guilty officer allegedly was helping a college friend do a story on the types of ships in the Long Beach Harbor.

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Security measures on the ship were increased in reaction not only to the press investigations, but to a wave of bombing threats in the general Los Angeles area. The concern for security was reinforced after a Catalina tour boat was targeted and destroyed by a radical group at a pier in the nearby Los Angeles Harbor. Howard Hughes and his reported relationship with CIA made the *Glomar Explorer* a natural target for the radicals, and security mounted a deck watch to warn of any suspicious approaches to the ship from the harbor channel. Anti-swimmer nets were made and kept handy on the main deck to be used against any swimmers approaching the ship. The guard force at the pier gate was increased, and packages, sacks or bags going on the pier had to be opened, inspected, and stamped by security. No explosives were going to go on the ship through either deliberate attempts or the duping of innocents.

Vigilance against Soviet observation and espionage was maintained. Russian ships were constantly docking at a pier directly across the channel. Precious little shipping activity seemed to be taking place around them, and, as someone said, they probably

(b)(1) The opening of hatches which would expose the well area to photographic surveillance had

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to have the approval of the security officer. Yet no overt or covert interest in the *Glomar Explorer* by the Russian ships was ever observed.

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## Phase-out

But the harpies of the shore had been busy all the time the crew was putting the ship through its paces, and in late June the word came down from higher authority that the mission was canceled. There would be only one last trip to sea for the *Explorer* and its crew, and that would be for the purpose of a final clean-up [redacted]

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A few

days prior to departure, the tax assessor of Los Angeles County slapped a tax lien on the ship for \$4,685,882.07. He had in effect seized the vessel and was going to put it up for sale at public auction on 27 August. The assessor sent a watch keeper to the pier to prevent the ship from departing. While he was watching the ship, the on-board security officer was watching him. The eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation was resolved within a day by the necessary legal maneuvers. The *Glomar Explorer* departed the pier on 20 August for her final clean-up.

Meanwhile, although the government maintained its "no comment" stance after the Jack Anderson expose' in March, the newspapers continued to trumpet the story, playing and replaying articles combining the wildest of speculations, inventions, half-truths, conjectures and fragments of the facts. In this they inadvertently served the security interests of the government, for it looked very much as if the Soviets were as confused about the mission's purpose and degree of success as were ordinary American newspaper readers. It was security's job to keep it that way; there was to be no confirmation or denial of any of the stories circulating in the press.

This became a delicate task as the program phase-out began. Crew members and other workers were laid off, since only a small maintenance force was to be kept on the ship. The debriefings by security had to be done in a way that would minimize the chances that employees would leave the program with a grudge against it; news stories could easily result from such sources. The debriefings were conducted professionally and with empathy toward the work force. No leaks to the press resulted from the crew roll-off procedures.

A serious effort was made to find alternate uses for the ship; the General Services Administration undertook this responsibility along with Global Marine, Inc. When tours of the ship were arranged for interested parties, it was security's job to make sure the critical spaces were avoided. The control center was the only major portion that needed protecting [redacted]

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Global Marine was permitted to make a commercial movie about the *Glomar Explorer* in order to advertise its capabilities. Richard Anderson from the *Six Million Dollar Man* television series was the narrator. Again some glamour returned to the ship, and again security had to be alert to prevent any would-be movie stars among the

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crew from making unauthorized film debuts. Also, certain areas of the ship had to remain protected from the camera's sweeping eye.

In November 1975 the government's on-board staff security officer was removed and replaced by a former employee hired on contract. By now the ship was in a configuration in which there was essentially no chance for erosion of security. Efforts to find alternate uses had not been successful, and there was little activity on board other than routine maintenance. Finally, when the U.S. Navy took over control of the *Glomar Explorer* and started the mothballing process a staff security officer returned to the ship during the turnover activities to conduct a physical inspection in conjunction with officers from the Navy and the Maritime Administration.

After a couple of years in mothballs, the *Glomar Explorer* was reactivated for legitimate deep-ocean mining tests. While the ship was in drydock for refurbishment some material was found in a remote part of the well that looked suspiciously like remnants of Soviet canned goods, either cabbage or carrots, left over from the exploitation of the submarine. The item was quickly and carefully sequestered by some of the ship's crew who had remembered their lectures on security and radioactive contamination. A team of experts was sent to examine the find. It turned out to be non-radioactive sauerkraut of U.S. origin.

#### Exploitation

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**Valediction**

It has been said that a program designed to have no risk has the best security. Too often this implies no action and no results. AZORIAN was a high-risk program, full of action and results. The security afforded it was the best.

**This entire article is classified SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM.**